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SUBJECT: ABDULLAH'S CONCERNS: FRAUD, SECURITY, AND HIS
FUTURE

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Classified By: Ambassador Francis Ricciardone, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: Presidential challenger Dr. Abdullah Abdullah recently told Ambassador Eikenberry that he objected to being lumped with President Karzai's wholesale fraud. He would contest losing legitimate votes in the IEC/ECC auditing process, but generally agrees with the auditing mechanisms. After a sharp public message and private anxiety, he sent his observers to the first and second days of auditing. On a separate issue, he expressed concern that government-led programs to arm local groups are out of control, and has sent us a video of alleged government payoffs to the Taliban. Abdullah's political room to maneuver is tightening, but he appears unwilling to make a final arrangement that would end his candidacy. End Summary.

Assessment of Fraud: Questions

¶2. (S) On September 30 a preoccupied Abdullah reviewed with us his current situation in light of the departure of D/SRSG Galbraith, recent media reports that the Foreign Ministers attending the "Friends of Afghanistan" meeting in New York had expressed confidence in a Karzai victory, and the delays in getting the ECC audit underway. Abdullah said that rumors about Galbraith had been confusing and "debated" and said that "I need to call him." (Comment: we have unconfirmed reports that Ambassador Galbraith has been in telephone contact with Abdullah, end comment.)

¶3. (S) The ECC audit and sampling methodology seem sound, the Ambassador told Abdullah, and it was a good decision to add the extra boxes which were omitted in the first sample (note: due to an error in the English translation of whether all votes or only valid votes were being counted, end note.) He pointed out that training candidates in the auditing added transparency in the process. He told Abdullah that the documenting of fraud would be "your legacy." Abdullah confirmed he has sent agents to be trained, and agreed that the methodology seemed fine "once they explained it." The problem was when the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) gets involved -- "they are not trustworthy." For example, they transport ballot boxes without allowing observers to take part.

¶4. (S) Abdullah expressed uneasiness at that point that all boxes in a category, or "universe" should be disqualified for gross fraud on the part of one candidate and not the other (i.e., himself.) He said that he wants it "known" afterwards which boxes belonged to which candidate and what they did -- so he would not be linked to "historical" fraud. When the Ambassador pressed him to get a fuller explanation of the process or allow the U.S. to facilitate greater communication, Abdullah said that he has good access to the ECC and the international experts directing the audit.

Anger at Eide

¶15. (S) Abdullah told us that he was very angry at the recent UNSC report by SRSG Eide because Eide refers to "everyone" committing fraud. "Does he have proof?" Abdullah asked, noting that fraud committed by his followers was so insignificant that in his strongholds, Baghdis and Panjshir, there was a healthy mix of candidates who got votes, including Karzai. There was no institutional framework to support his fraud, Abdullah said. "We've digested so much on behalf of the country," he said, that being accused of Karzai's gross fraud is too much. He mentioned that he'd had a 'difficult conversation' with Eide on September 24, before Eide's trip to New York. Eide asked if Abdullah were questioning his integrity and Abdullah said he'd replied "no, I'm not, but I will if I have to."

¶16. (S) The Ambassador expressed our continued support for the process but also noted the need for a balance between credibility and timeliness. Abdullah said he has been asked by many others if the reported U.S. position that Karzai would likely win in the first or second round "constitutes a shift" in our policy; we replied that no, it does not. We reiterated our continued concern that delays could force a second round, if required, into the spring. Abdullah asked if the Minister of Interior would be able to claim that a second round was impossible to secure; Eikenberry responded that Atmar could not do so, and we continue to believe that security can be provided.

¶17. (S) Abdullah again claimed that his followers, especially government employees such as teachers, have been intimidated or targeted for retribution. He "blames himself" for

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exposing them, he said, although he has not responded to our repeated requests for specific information on teacher firings or other such acts. He did report that one of his campaign organizers in Kunduz was assassinated on September 25.

Shaky Support for the Process

¶18. (S) On October 3, Abdullah held an hour-long press conference which drew from the Galbraith letter. He accused SRSG Eide of "support" for President Karzai and suppression of a report on voter turnout that would have proved that the real level of participation was far below the number of votes cast in key provinces. He expressed confidence in the audit process, but said that the international community would be responsible for the political crisis that would ensue if the final results were "unjust." After more ECC rule refinements, Abdullah's campaign manager threatened the ECC and IEC by email on October 4 that if Abdullah did not get another briefing on the process early the next morning he would not send his observers to the audit that started that day. The experts went to his house early October 5 and explained the process, and he agreed to allow his observers to participate. Abdullah advisor Farid Zekria told us later October 5 that the team went and was "happy enough" with the complex process, now that they had their questions answered, but it was going slowly with only 35 out of 350 boxes examined on the first day.

Concern over Informal Security Arrangements

¶19. (S) Abdullah raised the arming of local security groups. He gave the Ambassador a blurry mid-September video reportedly from Bahglan, from mid-September, which allegedly shows police turning over vehicles and weapons to the Taliban (note: it is not evident from the video what is the

affiliation of the non-uniformed men, and there is only footage of the police talking to them with weapons - it is unclear whose - in evidence. End note.) He also raised some of the community defense initiative (CDI) and other local security programs, including one under Karzai campaign leader, brother-in-law and "Director for the Independent Directorate of Highways" Arif Noorzai. Abdullah alleged that some old linkages among drug traffickers and former warlords were being reactivated under this program, naming a few such figures in the Takhar area.

¶10. (S) Ambassador Eikenberry reviewed some of the programs that are underway in the area of local defense forces, including the CDI and the AP3 in Wardak. He said that some of these were good efforts that had positive results, but other results remain uncertain. We are concerned, he said, that this not occur without oversight and without being fully developed with communities, governors and the ANSF. Such initiatives should be centrally controlled, transparent and accountable. Abdullah added, "and not politicized." Eikenberry concurred, noting that sometimes we are not aware of all the local influences at play. He agreed with Abdullah that we could get drawn into local rivalries through our programs.

Where Does Abdullah Go From Here?

¶11. (S) Abdullah told us that the IEC needs to resign, and that Parliament should get involved in reforming this corrupted system. Parliamentary elections with these institutions won't work, he said, stating that Provincial Council elections (where fraud is even more consequential since victory margins are narrow) have resulted in many reformists losing to corrupt candidates. He accused Karzai's supporters of not respecting the institutions and having created a "cracked foundation" for democracy.

¶12. (S) Outreach by Karzai's camp continues, he said, with continued appeals both to him and to his colleagues, including Rabbani (whom Karzai visited over the September 20-23 Eid holiday.) Abdullah said that Karzai is using governors to protest a second round, but those demonstrations are getting out of hand - compared to his own meeting on September 27, which had been peaceful. At his press conference October 3, he reiterated his previously-stated position that he is not going to be "part of a coalition government that is the outcome of an unjust election."

¶13. (S) Lower House (Wolesi Jirga) Speaker Yunus Qanooni, brother and closest advisor told us October 1 that Qanooni, one of Abdullah's key backers, has offered his services

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to both Dr. Abdullah and President Karzai, and would serve his country in any capacity they deemed appropriate. However, he remains steadfast behind Dr. Abdullah, and was present at the peaceful September 27 Abdullah gathering in Kabul that drew over 5,000 supporters. He said there would be no coalition government, but perhaps a National Participation government, likely hinting at roles for Qanooni and perhaps the son and son-in-law of Abdullah-supporter Burhanuddin Rabbani.
EIKENBERRY